

VZCZCXRO3177
OO RUEHDA
DE RUEHAK #0170/01 0301351
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 301351Z JAN 08 ZDK
FM AMEMBASSY ANKARA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5071
RUEKJCS/CJCS WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/OSD WASHDC//PA
RUEUITH/ODC ANKARA TU
INFO RUEHTH/AMEMBASSY ATHENS 8648
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 3811
RUEHDA/AMCONSUL ADANA 2653
RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS 6388
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 6214
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2795
RUEUITH/DET 1 39LG ANKARA TU
RHMFISS/USDOCO 6ATAF IZMIR TU
RHMFISS/39OS INCIRLIK AB TU
RHMFISS/AFOSI DET 523 IZMIR TU
RHMFISS/39ABG INCIRLIK AB TU
RHMFISS/AFOSI DET 522 INCIRLIK AB TU
RUEUITH/AFLO ANKARA TU

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 000170

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR INR/R/MR, EUR/SE, EUR/PD, NEA/PD, DRL
JCS PASS J-5/CDR S. WRIGHT

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 30, 2008

ANKARA 00000170 001.2 OF 003

In Today's Papers

Turkey in Heated Debates over Headscarf Freedom

All papers report the ruling AKP and opposition far right MHP have agreed on rules that will govern headscarf wearing at universities. The easing of the headscarf ban will apply only to universities, and female university students wearing the headscarf must tie it beneath their chin. The AKP-MHP proposal for amending articles 10 and 42 of the constitution and article 17 of the High Education Board (YOK) Law was signed by 348 lawmakers and was submitted Tuesday to the parliament for approval. Papers debate about exactly what kind of head covering will be allowed under the government's reform plans. Veils will not be allowed in universities, and the details would be outlined in a new regulation, say papers.

Prime Minister Erdogan told his party group Tuesday that with the headscarf reforms, his government is solely concerned with ending the victimization of girl students in universities and guaranteed that headscarf reforms would be limited to universities alone. Opposition CHP leader Deniz Baykal said the headscarf was a 'uniform' imported from fundamentalist regimes outside Turkey, and blamed the AKP and MHP for trying to change the state regime. Baykal stressed headscarf reforms contradict article 2 of the Constitution, the provision establishing the secularist nature of the state. Under the front page headline, "We Don't Need Their Judgment," Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak reports MHP leader Devlet Bahceli said his party made a deal with the AKP to end the 40-year old headscarf ban, and rejected warnings issued by Baykal, TUSIAD, and retired justices and prosecutors. The MHP added that the new regulation should contain detailed instructions about how scarves should be tied so as to prevent abuse for political goals. Deputy Prime Minister Cemil Cicek said the new regulation would allow the traditional folk headscarf. Cicek noted the expression "higher education" has been added to constitutional reforms to restrict the

reforms to universities.

Mainstream Sabah says that in 1989, the Constitutional Court annulled a proposed regulation to lift the ban on headscarves. In "Turkey Debates Headscarf," mainstream Vatan emphasizes that some groups in Turkey welcome the decision to lift headscarf restrictions in universities, while others believe the adjustments in universities are just "a beginning." Mainstream Aksam points to "widespread fears" that "girls who do not cover their heads will be pressured to do so, especially in the conservative eastern parts of the country." Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet says the AKP-MHP move for lifting the ban is met with concern in the West. "For the time being, the target is universities, and in time, them headscarf will spread to secondary schools," says Cumhuriyet. Liberal Radikal's front-page features a reproduction of the "Scream" painting by Edward Munch (see below); but the painting is modified so the subject is wearing a red headscarf. Superimposed on the picture is the headline, "Republic of Fear: Some are afraid the veil is coming while others are concerned their necks will be exposed."

Islamist-oriented Zaman claims, on the other hand, intellectuals, politicians, and the NGO representatives welcome the formula proposed by the AKP and MHP as "very positive." The paper lauds the politicians for meeting the demands of the majority.

Meanwhile, the Turkish General Staff (TGS) Yasar Buyukanit told the press Wednesday morning during a live broadcast joint news conference with visiting Macedonian defense minister that everybody in Turkey knew the military's opinion on the headscarf question. Buyukanit declined further elaboration.

Editorial Commentary on Turban Debate

Ismet Berkan commented in liberal Radikal (1/30): "While the turban issue is being debated, we've all forgotten that we were talking

ANKARA 00000170 002.2 OF 003

about the universities. In the universities, science should come ahead of the dress code. We all considered the universities as state offices, business places or even military barracks and created this huge problem. Today, we cannot resolve this issue without damaging the principle of secularism. Our secularists preferred to be aggressive rather than being wise on the issue. They should clearly see that religious issues cannot be framed by laws. Now, the latest solution will be debated for days, many protests will be arranged, remarks will be delivered and as a country, we will waste our energy for nothing. Perhaps, in the end, the Constitutional Court will abolish the Constitutional amendment. Or, because of the clear political will, the result will not change, and the turban ban will be lifted. Most likely, this change will be implemented at the expense of damaging secularism. Secularism will be damaged because Turkey will be remembered as a country that changed the constitution in order to bring freedom to a religious issue. I believe that article 24 of the Constitution already encompasses this freedom. Unfortunately, the secularists managed to turn secularism into a dogmatic religion and now, because of those secular dogmas, we've reached a point where we've actually damaged secularism."

Prosecutor Asks for 10 Year Prison Term for Demirtas

All papers report the Diyarbakir prosecutor seeks a ten-year prison sentence in two separate cases against the pro-Kurdish DTP leader Nurettin Demirtas for making PKK propaganda in speeches in Diyarbakir and Brussels. Demirtas is in prison for allegedly obtaining a falsified medical report to avoid military service, which is compulsory in Turkey.

Meanwhile, papers report that in a report submitted to a Diyarbakir court in connection with a Roj TV trial, Danish Media Secretariat says the pro-Kurdish television's broadcasts do not violate Danish laws. The court case was launched against 56 DTP mayors across southeast Turkey for asking in a letter to PM Rasmussen not to take Roj TV broadcasts off the air.

Turkey-Iraq Speed Up Military Cooperation

Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet reports that during a 'surprise'

visit to Baghdad on January 15, the deputy chief of the Turkish General Staff (TGS) General Ergin Saygun discussed with his Iraqi counterpart General Nasier Abadi and US General Petraeus intelligence sharing and operational cooperation between the two countries as well as providing training in Turkey for the Iraqi military personnel. Turkey and Iraq have sped up cooperation efforts following Turkey's military operations against PKK targets in northern Iraq. Abadi is expected to visit Turkey once General Saygun returns home from his talks in the US, according to Cumhuriyet.

Barak to Visit Turkey Mid-February

Liberal Radikal reports the Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak will pay a visit to Turkey on February 12-13 for talks with the Chief of the Turkish General Staff (TGS) General Yasar Buyukanit, Prime Minister Erdogan, and President Abdullah Gul. The visit aims at expanding cooperation between the two countries.

Israeli Ambassador to Turkey, Gabby Levy, told Radikal the visit was very important in demonstrating the strength of Turkey-Israel cooperation. Levy said Israel understands the reaction of Erdogan when the PM denounced last week's Israeli military operations in Gaza. Levy noted Turkey and Israel will explore possibilities for using new technologies like nanotechnology in the fight against terror.

Editorial Commentary on President Bush's State of the Union Address

Gungor Uras wrote in mainstream Milliyet (1/30): "President Bush delivered his last State of the Union speech yesterday. Although it was expected that he would focus on the economy, Bush focused more on the war and the Middle East. The most important part of the

ANKARA 00000170 003.2 OF 003

speech for Turkey was the part about the US' Middle East policies and Bush's determination that the US continue the war and maintain a military presence in the Gulf. Bush said, "Everyone should know this: the US will continue fighting against the ones threatening our military. The US will protect its vital interests in the Gulf and will continue to support its allies." The lesson we should take from these remarks is: President Bush openly stressed that the US will remain in the Middle East permanently and will use political and military power there. Turkey should consider this fact when it establishes relations with the Muslim and Arab world in the region and should avoid any political and economic act in the region that would clash with US interests. It is obvious that the US Administration is not taking the economic crisis seriously and political and military issues have a higher importance."

TV Highlights

NTV

Domestic News

- The ruling AKP has denounced US Democrat presidential candidates Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama for their pledges to recognize Armenian genocide claims.
- One more suspect has been arrested in Istanbul in connection with the 'Ergenekon' operation, increasing the number arrests for ties with the criminal network to 29.
- The Economist expects Turkish inflation to drop to 8.1 percent in 2008.

International News

- In his final State of the Union address, President Bush said the situation in Iraq was improving but that the fight was far from over. He also vowed to confront Iran where necessary and do everything to reach a Middle East peace deal.
- 11 parliamentarians of the main French center-right political party, the Union for a Popular Movement (UMP,) adopted a statement on preventing Turkey's membership in the EU.

- On Tuesday, the US House of Representatives approved an economic stimulus package worth an estimated USD 150 billion.

MCELDOWNEY